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ABSTRACT

Because sexual harassment by faculty can deter college women from entering male-dominated fields, college administrators face the serious task of determining effective policies to deal with such harassment. This study was conducted to examine students' ratings of appropriate punishment for male professors who harass female students. The effects of gender and behavior on suggested punishment for sexual harassment of female students by male faculty members were examined for a wide range of behaviors. Male (N=96) and female (N=106) college students completed a questionnaire which briefly described 25 situations which might occur between a male professor and one of his current female students, both within and outside the classroom. All nine recognized categories of sexual harassment and six innocuous items of appropriate student-instructor interactions were included. Subjects rated the appropriate discipline for sexual harassment for each item with punishment ratings on a seven-point scale ranging from no punishment to filing criminal charges. A two-way analysis of variance revealed significant main effects and an interaction, with each p .005. Pair-wise post hoc comparisons allowed for the isolation of clusters of acts deserving similar punishments and revealed significant sex differences on 13 of the 20 harassing behaviors, especially among items describing more moderate levels of harassment. Male students were significantly less punitive overall than were female students. (Author/NB)

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Influences on Proposed Punishment for Sexual Harassment

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Abstract

The effects of gender and behavior on suggested punishment for sexual harassment of female students by male faculty members were examined for a wide range of behaviors. Punishment ratings were on a seven-point scale ranging from no punishment to filing criminal charges. Analyses were conducted with data from 96 male and 106 female students (ages 18-41 years, $\underline{M}$ = 24.44, $\underline{SD}$= 5.86). A two-way mixed design analysis of variance revealed significant main effects and an interaction, with each $p < .005$. Pair-wise post hoc comparisons allowed for the isolation of clusters of acts deserving similar punishments and revealed significant sex differences on 13 of the 20 harassing behaviors, especially among items describing more moderate levels of harassment.

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Influences on Proposed Punishment for Sexual Harassment

College campuses are not immune to sexual harassment. The reported incidence varies from 17 to 38% for verbal harassment, 6 to 13% for unwanted fondling or kissing, and 2 to 3% for outright sexual bribery (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Benson & Thomson, 1982; Cammeart, 1985; Wilson & Kraus, 1983). Because harassment by faculty can deter college women from entering male-dominated fields (Benson & Thomson, 1982), college administrators face the serious task of determining effective policies to deal with it. The present study examines students' ratings of appropriate punishment for male professors who harass female students.

Most of the current literature has explored perceptions of the degree of inappropriateness of various harassing acts. Generally acts are labeled harassment when a student and instructor have had no prior social interaction, but the instructor behaves with unusual intimacy or coercion (Adams et al., 1983; Benson & Thomson, 1982; Cammeart, 1985; Wilson & Kraus, 1983). Specific categories of offensive behaviors include undue attention (such as flirting), sexist comments (including sexist jokes), invitations (for dates or to private places), body language (such as standing too close), emotional come-ons (affective pressure of a sexually suggestive nature), verbal advances (including explicit sexual propositions), physical advances (such as pats, pinches, or fondling),

sexual bribery (rewards, threats, or retaliation), and coerced sexual contact (e.g., Adams et al., 1983; Benson & Thomson, 1982; Weber-Burdin & Rossi, 1982; Wilson & Kraus, 1983).

There are general norms by which we perceive the inappropriateness of harassing acts (Padgitt & Padgitt, 1986). This is particularly true for more extreme acts (propositions, physical advances, sexual bribery, and coerced sexual contact), for which male and female students' degree-of-harassment ratings show over 90% agreement. However, the genders differ significantly on less extreme behaviors (undue attention, sexist comments, invitations, body language, emotional come-ons, and verbal sexual advances short of explicit propositions); women students label these acts harassment more often than male students do (Adams et al., 1983). This suggests that women may be oversensitive or subject to a "feminist overreaction." However, Wilson and Kraus (1983) found that women who have reported sexual harassment score no differently from others on scales of feminist ideology, social competance, and success at developing shared sexual standards with their dates.

Little research has been conducted on perception of the appropriate punishment for sexual harassment, although, from the administrative perspective this is at least as important as the "degree" of sexual harassment. The present study was designed to examine student perception of appropriate punishment for a range of harassing behaviors. Innocuous "filler" items were mixed in with items depicting harassment

to allow finer discrimination of gender differences in perception at lower harassment levels. It was hypothesized that because men find the milder acts less harassing than women do, they would recommend lighter punishments. In addition, ratings on the punishment scale were expected to replicate ratings on degree-of-harassment scales, i.e. behaviors rated in earlier studies as more inappropriate should receive higher prescribed punishments.

Methods

Subjects

Subjects were 215 college subjects from a small southwestern public college. Thirteen subjects were eliminated before analysis because of missing data. The remaining 202 included 96 men and 106 women, with average ages of 24.22 and 24.59 (SD = 5.18 and 6.42), respectively. Subjects' reported class levels were 16% lower division, 81% upper division and 3% graduate-level students. A reasonable spread across majors was achieved: 26% business majors; 12% natural sciences and math; 15% behavioral sciences; 24% humanities; 7% physical education; 10% health sciences, and 5% undecided or other.

Instrument

The questionnaire briefly described 25 situations which might occur between a male professor and one of his current female students, both

within (11 items) and outside the classroom (14 items). All nine of the recognized categories of sexual harassment were included. For example, to assess harassment involving sexist comments within the classroom one item had the professor remark in class, "You're intelligent...for a woman." Six innocuous items (i.e. appropriate student-instructor interactions) were included to serve as a validity check for the ratings.

Instructions requested "opinions about the appropriate discipline for sexual harassment" and stated that "some of the situations may be appropriate acts that deserve no punishment, while others may involve seriously inappropriate behaviors." Punishment ratings were made on a 7-point scale, where: 0 = no punishment (innocent act); 1 = no punishment (bad taste); 2 = verbal reprimand; 3 = official report in personnel file; 4 = suspension from teaching; 5 = termination from teaching; and, 6 = criminal charges. To minimize respondents' reactivity to items focusing on males as harassers, the survey acknowledged that males are sometimes harassed by females, but that this study was looking only at male faculty harassment of female students. In addition, confidentiality was assured.

Procedure

Subjects were recruited by six upper division psychology majors and were informed that data were being collected to study appropriate discipline for sexual harassers. At least 75% of the subjects were recruited within General Education classes and the remainder were

individually tested in public areas on campus. Each of the six researchers worked independently, exact percentages are not known. The researchers attempted to test without bias a random sample of the college's students. Subjects were given as much time as necessary to complete the questionnaire.

Results

A 2X25 mixed design analysis of variance examined the effects of gender and item content on ratings. There were significant main effects for gender, $F(1,200) = 14.59$, $p < .005$, with men averaging 1.52 and women averaging 1.76, and for item content, $F(24,4800) = 592.03$, $p < .001$; and there was a significant interaction, $F(24,4800) = 3.02$, $p < .0001$. Results are shown in Table 1. Using a .05 significance level and Tukey's honestly significant difference test for pairwise comparisons, mean item ratings are significantly different if they are at least .29 apart and simple main effects occur for gender if two item means are at least .25 apart.

Discussion

As was expected, male students were significantly less punitive overall, and the greatest gender differences in punishment were found among the more moderate offenses. Although the gender difference was not significant for every item, men's ratings, on average, were significantly more lenient than women's on every non-filler item. These gender differences were most consistent for behaviors involving sexist comments (e.g., saying the student is intelligent for a woman) and body

language (e.g., eying her suggestively). The average woman said these behaviors merited verbal reprimands, and the average man saw them as bad taste requiring no punitive action.

Hypothesized gender differences failed to occur among invitations (for a date) and emotional come-ons (e.g., an instructor saying she reminds him of an old girlfriend). Although Adams et al. (1983) found that women find such behaviors significantly more harassing than men do, women agree with men not to punish these acts. Perhaps this is because invitations and emotional come-ons are relatively direct, non-physical advances that lack coercion or physical contact.

Some gender differences emerged unexpectedly. Males recommended significantly less punishment for patting a student's bottom, a physical advance for which Adams et al. (1983) results led us to predict gender agreement. In addition, the present study uncovered a gender difference on the forced sexual contact item, for which the average woman student would press criminal charges, while the average male student would only fire the perpetrator. This disparity may be due to the overly broad example of the offense used on the present questionnaire, "intercourse or rubbing breasts or genitals." Women may have been responding to one aspect of this description and men to another, so the gender difference is ambiguous. However, it is possible that many men consider the loss of a job as sufficient punishment for any sexual offense.

Significant mean rating gaps were found between punishment

categories, with subjects indicating significantly more severe punishments for coerced sexual contact, bribery, and intentional physical advances, more moderate punishments for sexist comments, inappropriate body language, verbal advances, and ambiguous behaviors (e.g., joking about sex for grades rather than outright bargaining or "accidentally" brushing against her breast), and relatively light punishment for emotional come-ons and invitations without coersion. This robust ordering supports Padgitt and Padgitt's (1986) finding that there are general norms for perceiving and dealing with harassment, although results clearly indicate that men, on average, recommend less severe punishments.

The gender differences within the current data point to a practical difficulty faced in universities predominantly directed by male administrators. If men prescribe the punishments for male offenders, women, on average, will feel that victims' suffering and inconvenience are underestimated by male authorities. This perception may keep females from reporting sexual harassment, leading to the continuation of such activities. Further research is indicated to develop methods to reach a consensus on appropriate punishment for campus sexual harassment.

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Table 1

Summary of Mean Item Responses

Item Content	Category	Group					
		Overall		Men		Women	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Forces sexual contact	Forced Sex	5.42	1.10	5.14*	1.31	5.67	0.80
Lowers grade because student refuses to have sex	Bribery	4.20	0.99	4.10	1.04	4.28	0.94
Says "an 'A' could be arranged if she'd date him."	Bribery	3.35	1.09	3.25	1.05	3.43	1.13
Kisses her	Physical Advance	3.01	1.27	2.95	1.24	3.07	1.30
Pats her bottom	Physical Advance	3.00	1.03	2.81*	1.07	3.17	.97
Jokes that females could improve grades by having sex with him	Bribery	2.88	1.19	2.71*	1.20	3.03	1.17
Says "What a body."	Sexist Remark	2.04	0.87	1.89*	0.87	2.18	0.85
Has picture of nude at desk	Sexist Remark	2.02	1.16	1.85*	1.24	2.17	1.07
Stares at her breasts	Body Language	1.66	0.82	1.46*	0.79	1.84	0.81
Says "Great outfit, it reveals the best of you."	Verbal Advance	1.63	1.00	1.46*	0.99	1.78	0.99
Joins in in telling sexually explicit jokes	Sexist Remark	1.59	1.00	1.43*	1.01	1.74	0.98
Accidentally (?) brushes his hand against her breast	Physical Advance	1.49	1.14	1.22*	1.11	1.73	1.13
Looks in her eyes suggestively	Body Language	1.36	0.76	1.15*	0.77	1.55	0.71
Says that women have a low potential for work	Sexist Remark	1.36	0.88	1.10*	0.72	1.59	0.94
Says,"You're intelligent...for a woman."	Sexist Remark	1.33	0.88	1.09*	0.67	1.55	1.00
Speaks against ERA and says that women belong in home	Sexist Remark	1.26	1.03	0.97*	0.93	1.53	1.05
Asks for a date	Invitation	0.98	1.08	0.95	1.09	1.01	1.08
Says he's glad to see her outside the stuffy classroom	Emotional Advance	0.86	1.04	0.78	1.14	0.92	0.94

(table continues)

Item Content	Category	Overall		Men		Women	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Says,"You remind me of an old girlfriend."	Emotional Advance	0.72	0.62	0.70	0.62	0.75	0.63
Says that she has unusual understanding	Filler	0.38	0.62	0.33	0.59	0.42	0.65
Remarks that her test was highest in class	Filler	0.17	0.49	0.16	0.51	0.19	0.48
Comments "nice work" on paper	Filler	0.14	0.44	0.18	0.50	0.10	0.36
Asks to borrow pencil	Filler	0.11	0.44	0.11	0.48	0.11	0.40
Asks for the time	Filler	0.10	0.38	0.12	0.44	0.08	0.31
Says,"great weather."	Filler	0.04	0.23	0.04	0.25	0.05	0.21

* significant gender difference, $p < .05$.